DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 189 488 CG 014 513

AUTHOR O'Connor, Patricia A.
TITLE The Role of Sex Stereotyping in Children's Occupational Selection.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 12p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (51st, Hartford, CT, April 9-12, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Choice; Career Development; *Children; *Developmental Psychology; Elementary Secondary Education; *Sex Differences; *Sex Stereotypes; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

The process of occupational selection has been the subject of extensive research, particularly the extent to which sex stereotypes of occupations account for occupational choice. It was hypothesized that the inclination to select sex-stereotyped occupations would account for significantly more of the generalized variance in children's occupational choice than would gender or the tendency to choose powerful, prestigious, or complex occupations or occupations requiring strength or gentleness. Students at various educational levels (N=417) completed questionnaires dealing with occupational preference and choice. Results supported the hypothesis. Further analyses revealed that the sex of the subject was also an important factor in occupational choice. (Author/HLM)

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ED189488

THE ROLE OF SEX-STEREOTYPING IN CHILDREN'S OCCUPATIONAL SELECTION

Patricia A. O'Connor, Ph.D.

Instructor in Child Psychology
College of Physicians and Surgeons
Columbia University

Department of Child Psychiatry
New York State Psychiatric Institute

CG 014513

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Hartford, Connecticut, April, 1980.

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THE ROLE OF SEX-STEREOTYPING IN CHILDREN'S OCCUPATION SELECTION [1]

Patricia A. O'Connor, Ph.D.[2]

The process of occupation selection has been the subject of extensive research with different theories proposing unique alternatives to the "why" of occupational choice. Three theories which are more widely known and may be considered representative of the field are Holland's (1966,1973) model of personality-environment matching in occupational selection, Ginzberg's (1961,1972) theory of the process of career choice and Crites' (1969, 1976) model of career maturity. Each of these theories has used a developmental approach and has hypothesized that the process (according to Ginzberg) or matching (according to Holland) begins long before an individual embarks on a career. For Crites, even more than the others, the significant factor is the number of developmental phases through which an individual has passed and the level of maturity at the entrance to each phase, both of which relate to subsequent career adjustment. What has been neglected in these occupational models, however, has been the way that sex-stereotypes of occupations color environmental appraisal or limit the information gathering necessary in the selection of a career. The study that I am reporting on today specifically examines this issue, i.e., the extent to which sex stereotypes of occupations account for occupational choice.

Until recently, boys were overtly encouraged to purse "male" occupations, such as doctor and truck driver, while girls were strongly encouraged to consider marriage, motherhood and typically "female" occupations, such as nurse and stewardess, as their primary goals. Extensive research in the past few years has established the continued pervasiveness of these attitudes. Any theory of occupation selection must take this socialization process into account. It seems that an appropriate model of occupation selection would start by recognizing the social values that are placed on occupations and the importance of those social values for particular groups (in this case, males and females), regardless of individual personality variables. Occupation models,

[1] Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Hartford, Connecticut, April, 1980.

[2] Department of Child Psychiatry
New York State Psychiatric Institute

such as those of Holland, Ginzberg, and Crites, seem to neglect or disregard the potential effect of sex-stereotyping of occupations in children's choices. It seems to me that imbedded in Crites' and Ginzberg's descriptive models must be notions of occupations designated as acceptable by traditional sex-stereotypes, and that prior to Holland's model of personality-environment matching comes a more basic division of labor into those occupations appropriate for males and those for females.

The study I am reporting on examined the role of sex-stereotyping in children's occupational choices. Occupations can be viewed as "possessing" particular social values to a greater or lesser extent, one of those values being sex-type. In this study it was hypothesized that, while particular values assigned to particular occupations may be important to an individual in occupation selection, the most salient dimension will be the sex-stereotypes of occupations. Thus, a primary (primary here refers to sequential order, not magnitude) determinant of occupational choice will be the sex-role stereotype of that occupation, regardless of other individual values involved in the selection process. Specifically, it was hypothesized that the inclination to select sex-stereotyped occupations would account for significantly more of the generalized variance in children's occupational choice than would factors such as sex of respondent, or the tendency to select powerful, prestigious or complex occupations or occupations requiring strength or gentleness.

The sample consisted of students, all volunteers, in kindergarten, third, sixth, ninth and twelfth grades in a New York City suburban school system (N = 417) (Table 1). Questionnaires were administered as a paper-and-pencil-test in all grades except kindergarten where the administration was verbal.

The instrument, in two parts, was derived primarily from work I had done previously. (O'Connor, 1976). In Part I (Table 2), respondents were presented with 26 pairs of occupations and asked to choose one of each pair as the most desirable for him/herself. Normative ratings had been established for each of these occupations, by a seperate sample of adults (N = 118). The pairs of occupations were combined so that each pair represented the selection of a single dimension, i.e., prestige, power, complexity, gentleness, strength, or masculinity-femininity (sex-stereotyping), on which that pair

was contrasted. The pairs were constructed so that the members of a single pair were equal on the other five dimensions. Each of the dimensions were represented by 4 matched pairs with the exception of sex-stereotyping for which there were 6 pairs. Thus a score could be derived for each dimension, indicating the salience of that dimension to the respondent. A high score could be interpreted to mean that dimension was important to the respondent, a low score would indicate the importance of the negation of that dimension, and an intermediate score could be interpreted as evidence for the lack of salience of that dimension (range = 0 to 4 for all except stereotyping, where range = 0 to 6).

Part II was simply an open-ended question asking the respondent's occupational choice. Each answer was then scored with the six corresponding normative ratings established with the adult sample (examples in Table 3).

Subjects selected 45 different occupations in response to the open-ended question in Part II. To make these responses more manageable for analyses, cluster analysis was used as a data reduction technique. The occupations were grouped with the normative ratings forming the basis for the clustering. From this procedure I obtained 9 separate clusters with 3 to 7 occupations per cluster (examples in Table 4). Cluster scores were calculated as the mean of each of the factors over all occupations within a cluster. The individual scores were assigned to subjects on the basis of their selected occupations and were then used as the dependent variable in examining the extent to which sex-stereotyping plays a role in children's occupational choice.

Dimension scores were calculated by summing across the matched pairs for each dimension, as described earlier, and those scores, along with age and sex of respondent, were entered first in a discriminant function analysis. All were entered as a single set to avoid the difficulty of some variables having an insufficient F-to-enter and, therefore, being excluded from the analysis. The sex-stereotyping score was entered as a second step in the discriminant analysis. The overall multivariate level was satisfactorily high (Wilks' Lambda = .47, F = 4.30, $p < .001$) and, more importantly for the question of interest, the increment in Rao's V was significant ($p < .003$).

Thus the hypothesis that the tendency to select occupations within traditional sex-stereotypes, as measured here, accounts for a significant proportion of the generalized variance in occupation selection in both males and females. Further analyses showed that sex of subject, expectedly, plays the most important role in occupation selection, accounting for more variance than age or any of the social values that were measured, including stereotyping. However, and this is the importance of the findings from the study, the extent to which an individual chooses to select the stereotyped occupations is important beyond sex of subject in accounting for the variance in occupational choice.

There is a need, then, to consider a conceptual distinction between choices influenced by the sex of the subject and choices influenced by individual inclinations to stereotype. Theories of occupational choice have, in general, focused primarily on the ways in which males select occupations with little or no consideration given to differences that might appear with females. The findings from this study appear to point out another area where the effects of sex role socialization must be considered. In this case, explanatory occupational choice models, such as those mentioned earlier, should be modified so that they will account for these socialization effects, first in terms of group differences (that is, men chose male occupations) and second in terms of individual differences (that is, one individual is more likely to stereotype than another).

TABLE 1

GRADE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION

GRADE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL (Ea. GRADE)
KINDERGARTEN	55	50	105
THIRD	59	74	133
SIXTH	38	58	96
NINTH	26	38	64
TWELFTH	11	8	19
TOTAL (BY SEX)	189	228	417

TABLE 2

EXAMPLES OF MATCHED PAIRS

DIMENSION	RATING	ITEM
PRESTIGE	HI-LO	SINGER/REPAIR SHOES
POWER	HI-MED	OWN A FACTORY/ARCHITECT
COMPLEXITY	LO-HI	DELIVER MAIL/SCHOOL PRINCIPAL
GENTLE	HI-MED	DOCTOR/SCIENTIST
STRENGTH	HI-LO	BALLET DANCER/ARTIST
STEREOTYPING (MALE-FEMALE)	M-F	SPORTS ANNOUNCER/TELEPHONE OPERATOR

Table 3

Examples of Scores for Selective Occupations by Dimension
(From Normative Ratings)

Occupation	Prestige[1]	Power[1]	Complexity[1]	Male/Female[2]	Gentleness[1]	Strength[1]
Chef	3.99	3.94	4.06	5.77	3.46	3.23
Dentist	6.06	5.22	6.29	6.02	5.94	2.74
Jockey	4.21	3.39	3.08	5.80	2.89	4.31
Nurse	4.76	4.54	5.47	1.97	6.30	3.75

1 High Score = more of named dimension, range = 1 to 7

2 High Score = more masculine, range = 1 to 7

TABLE 4

EXAMPLES OF MEANS OF CLUSTERS

	PRESTIGE[1]	POWER[1]	COMPLEXITY[1]	STEREOTYPING[2] (MALE/FEMALE)	GENTLENESS[1]	STRENGTH[1]
CLUSTER 1						
ARCHITECT, MARKET, FACTORY, DETECTIVE, SPORTS, CHEF, BAND	4.74	4.49	4.45	6.02	3.04	2.71
CLUSTER 8						
BANK, DECORATE, SECRETARY, LIBRARY, BEAUTY SHOP, SELL THINGS	2.91	2.88	3.45	2.73	4.22	2.16
CLUSTER 9						
SINGER, WRITER, ARTIST	4.90	3.99	4.32	4.12	4.23	2.16

[1]HIGH SCORE = MORE OF NAMED DIMENSION, RANGE = 1 TO 7

[2]HIGH SCORE = MORE MASCULINE, RANGE = 1 TO 7

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